



**EMBARGO, 21<sup>st</sup> JUNE 2006, 11:30**

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **A new mechanism to prevent torture**

“The OPCAT is the most important development for the effective prevention of torture at the universal level” said Manfred Nowak, the UN Special rapporteur on torture.

The Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture (OPCAT), a new international mechanism to prevent torture, will come into force on 22 June 2006. This will lead to the creation of a UN Subcommittee on Prevention and independent national visiting bodies which will conduct in-country visits to all places of detention. Countries that ratified the OPCAT have to set up these national visiting bodies within a year.

Regular and unannounced visits to any place of detention is one of the best ways to prevent torture and ill treatment. Until now, there was no system of such preventive visits at universal level, which contributed to a lack of transparency of the conditions and treatment of people in detention. The Subcommittee and national visiting mechanisms will be able to access any form of detention where people can not leave at will, such as prisons, police stations or psychiatric hospitals. Under the OPCAT, countries also have to ensure that these international and national bodies have access to all the information on the treatment and conditions of prisoners and places of detention, as well as allow private interviews with detainees. Through the ratification, they will effectively open their places of detention to independent national and international scrutiny.

On 23 May 2006, Honduras and Bolivia ratified the OPCAT, which brought the total of States Parties up to the necessary 20 ratifications to bring it into force on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June. This has been one of the fastest ratification processes of an international human rights treaty, as it was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 18 December 2002.

The Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT), a Geneva-based non-governmental organisation was at the origin of the OPCAT and a key advocate in the ratification process. APT welcomes this entry into force and encourages other states to ratify the Protocol as soon as possible in order to prevent torture worldwide. APT also urges the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, NGOs and other representatives of civil society to prioritise the implementation of this innovative preventive mechanism.

#### **For further information, please contact:**

Edouard Delaplace, Senior Programme Officer, Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT), Geneva, Tel: +41 (0)22 919 21 83, Email: [edelaplace@apt.ch](mailto:edelaplace@apt.ch)  
[www.apt.ch](http://www.apt.ch)